

Stratton Upper School

Eagle Farm Road, Biggleswade, SG18 8JB

Inspection dates 24–25 April 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- The actions taken by leaders to improve the school have not yet had enough impact on students' progress or the quality of teaching.
- Not enough students make or exceed the progress they should in some GCSE subjects, including English and mathematics.
- Boys make less progress than girls in English and writing-based subjects.
- Students who are identified as being at risk of underachieving are not always given effective support.
- Teachers are not setting challenging enough targets for their own performance or that of the pupils.
- Teaching requires improvement in too many classes. Teachers do not always match the work to students' ability, encourage them to develop independence, ask searching questions or use comments in marking effectively to promote good progress.
- Not all subject leaders tell staff clearly enough how to improve their teaching, or give them enough opportunities to share what works well.
- The school has not fully reviewed the effectiveness of temporary staff to cover for absent teachers, or how it uses pupil premium funding to ensure good value for money.

The school has the following strengths

- The improvements made so far show that the leadership team is focused on the right priorities to improve the school, and has good capacity to do so.
- The sixth form is good. Most students make good progress and move on to employment, training and higher education.
- Students benefit from a range of outside visits and out-of-school activities.
- There have also been improvements in the behaviour and attendance of students. They behave well in most lessons and feel safe in school.
- The new governing body has a good awareness of the school's strengths, and is taking the right steps to challenge and support leaders in tackling its weaknesses.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 39 lessons, six of which were seen together with senior leaders.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body, other senior leaders, staff and groups of students.
- Inspectors took account of the 42 responses to the Parent View online questionnaire and the 83 responses from the staff questionnaire distributed for the inspection.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of documentation, including the school’s analysis of its own strengths and weaknesses, the school improvement plan, the system to track students’ progress, and records relating to behaviour and attendance. They also looked at records of lesson observations by senior staff, information about teachers’ performance, safeguarding documentation, external monitoring reports and a sample of students’ work.

Inspection team

Stephen Walker, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Ronald Cohen	Additional Inspector
Alan Jarvis	Additional Inspector
Paul O'Shea	Additional Inspector
Jackie Cousins	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Stratton Upper School converted to become an academy school in February 2012 and is run by the Stratton Education Trust. When its predecessor school, Stratton Upper School and Community College, was last inspected by Ofsted in 2009, it was judged to be good overall.
- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The school serves the town of Biggleswade and the surrounding villages. The school has a fully functioning farm on site which is looked after by the students and specialist staff.
- The school sponsors Gamlingay Village College, a feeder middle school in adjoining Cambridgeshire. The headteacher acts as the executive headteacher of the middle school and the two schools share a governing body.
- The large majority of students are from White British backgrounds.
- A smaller-than-average proportion of students are supported by the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in local authority care, students from armed services families and students known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportions of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action, and at school action plus or through a statement of special educational needs, are below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- A small number of Key Stage 4 students take work-related courses at Bedford College.
- The senior leadership team was restructured in September 2012 with the appointment of two new deputy headteachers.
- The school plays a leading part in the Central Bedfordshire Teaching School, which provides training for teachers within the consortium of schools.
- The school has received Investors in People and Artsmark awards and National Healthy Schools Status.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the standard of teaching to good or better by making sure that all teachers:
 - plan and adjust work in lessons so that it is at the right level for all students
 - give students frequent opportunities to work more independently and take more responsibility for their own learning
 - ask challenging questions in lessons to involve students more in their learning, check their understanding and extend their thinking
 - use marking to show students how to improve their work and gain higher grades.
- Improve GCSE results in all subjects, but particularly English and mathematics, by:
 - giving staff and students challenging targets for good or better progress
 - using the systems for tracking students' progress more effectively so that all teachers can provide additional support for all students at risk of underachieving
 - developing strategies to accelerate the progress of boys, particularly in English and literacy-based subjects

- Improve the effectiveness of leaders and managers in driving school improvement by:
 - eliminating inadequate teaching and reducing the amount of teaching that requires improvement
 - fully involving all subject leaders in improving teaching and students' progress through the sharing of good practice and coaching
 - fully evaluating how effectively the pupil premium is spent on narrowing the gap in achievement for eligible students
 - providing consistently good support for supply teachers
 - ensuring that teachers' performance targets are based on students making good progress, and address specific areas for development in teaching.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Standards at GCSE are not high enough in all subjects to demonstrate good progress. Students start at the school with broadly average attainment but more students are capable of gaining higher grades in their subjects, particularly in English, mathematics, science and design and technology. Although the majority of students are making the progress they should in most subjects, teaching is too variable so too few are making better than expected progress.
- Progress varies too much in English and mathematics at GCSE from year to year. Some boys underachieved last year in English, and some students underachieved in mathematics in the previous year. Progress also varies across subjects in Year 9, where the majority of students are making nationally expected progress but few exceeding it. Students are presently making better progress in mathematics than in English in their first year at the school, partly due to a more structured course that is now more closely linked to their previous work in the middle schools.
- The school has taken steps to encourage boys to read more widely and to give them greater support with their writing. The way mathematics is taught now has a greater emphasis on basic skills. Progress in English and mathematics is beginning to improve, and more students are on track to meet and exceed nationally expected progress in the GCSE examinations this summer.
- Most disabled students and those who have special educational needs make progress in line with their classmates. Nevertheless, the small numbers of students who are supported by a statement of special educational needs make good progress. This is because effective work from other adults helps them take part in lessons with the other students.
- Progress is good in art, drama, history and physical education, where most students gain the higher grades at GCSE. The school has reviewed its policy on early GCSE entry particularly in mathematics and all GCSE examinations are now taken in Year 11. The small number of Key Stage 4 students on work-related courses at Bedford College benefit from the practical approach to learning and make reasonable progress.
- Students in the sixth form achieve well in most AS and A2 subjects, as well as work-related courses. The school is now more active in advising students to select the most appropriate course in the sixth form. Predictions for the current year suggest that more students are on track to attain A* to B grades than in previous years.
- The recently introduced systems for tracking students' progress across the school, and better support provided for underachieving students, are beginning to lead to improved progress for many students. However, some teachers do not identify underachieving students quickly enough, or give them fully effective additional support and guidance.
- Students are given attainment targets in all subjects but these are not always sufficiently demanding to promote good or better progress towards GCSE examinations. Not all teachers are fully challenging their students so that they can gain the higher grades.
- The school is using additional funding to close the gap between the achievement of students eligible for the pupil premium and the other students by allocating money for teaching assistants to provide extra support in reading, writing and mathematics. However, this is not yet fully effective and their progress requires improvement. The attainment of these students is still typically at least one grade lower at GCSE than that of their classmates.

The quality of teaching**requires improvement**

- Teaching varies too much across the school to be good overall, and students do not make enough progress in some lessons. Although there is some good or better teaching in most subjects, there are still too many lessons where teaching requires improvement and a small number where it is inadequate.
- Teachers do not always make sure that the planned activities and instructions are set at the right level for all ability groups. Some students are not challenged enough because the work in lessons is sometimes too easy for them, while some are held back in their learning because the work is too hard and they need more guidance and support. Students mentioned that they make less progress in the lessons covered by supply teachers because the work is not always suited to their particular learning needs.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are benefiting from the extra support they receive in and out of class. However, not all teachers use the detailed information on their individual education plans to make the necessary adjustments to their planning or provide the extra help they need in lessons.
- Not enough teachers, particularly in Key Stages 3 and 4, encourage students to take greater responsibility for their own learning. In some lessons, students sit listening for too long without being actively involved or encouraged to think about the topic. Some teachers tend to do the thinking for the students and often provide answers too quickly.
- Some teachers are skilled at asking questions to engage the students and check understanding. However, some do not check frequently enough that students understand the work or are making progress. Too many teachers miss opportunities to ask probing questions to challenge the students and extend their thinking.
- There are some good examples of marking, with clear guidance to students on how to improve their work. However, the effectiveness of marking varies across the school and some does not show students how they can improve their work to gain higher grades. Students comment that they do not always know the requirements for the different grades at GCSE.
- In lessons where students make good or better progress, there is a very positive atmosphere for learning and students are eager to answer questions and take a full part in the learning. For example, Year 12 students made rapid progress as they prepared for a drama assessment. The teacher asked probing questions to ensure that all students reflected on their work and knew exactly what was needed to gain better marks.

The behaviour and safety of pupils**are good**

- The majority of students behave well in lessons and around the school, and this contributes to a calm and orderly environment. Parents, carers, staff and students confirm that behaviour has improved over the last year. There are now clearer expectations of behaviour and consistent systems to deal with any misbehaviour.
- Students are generally polite and courteous to staff and to each other. Sixth formers act as good role models and have opportunities to support the younger students by helping in tutor groups, acting as 'peer mentors' and organising lower school sports activities. Many students are involved in fundraising and out-of-school activities, particularly in sports and the performing arts.

- Students generally respond well to teachers' good use of praise and encouragement to promote high standards of behaviour. Students are developing their skills in managing their own behaviour and can be trusted to move around the corridors and socialise at break and lunchtime with only light supervision.
- Bullying of any kind is rare in the school. Students say that staff deal quickly and effectively with any unkind behaviour, such as name-calling or unpleasant comments on social networking sites. Students are aware of the different forms of possible bullying, such as cyber-bullying and prejudice-based bullying related to sex, gender, race and disability.
- The school makes every effort to ensure students feel safe and secure. Students display a good understanding of the issues relating to safety. They confirmed that the school provides them with good information on sex education and the dangers of smoking, alcohol and drugs. The National Healthy Schools Status reflects the emphasis that the school places on healthy eating and lifestyles.
- Leaders have introduced effective strategies to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence. Attendance is now broadly average and most students enjoy coming to the school.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- The school's leaders are not yet having enough impact on improving students' progress and the quality of teaching. The school is on a well-planned journey of improvement. It has already considerably improved behaviour and attendance in all year groups and the quality of education in the sixth form, and has reduced the amount of inadequate teaching. However, it has not yet ensured that teaching is mostly good or better.
- The headteacher and senior leadership team are providing clear leadership and are working closely with governors to address areas of underachievement. The newly appointed deputy headteachers are introducing new systems to improve the tracking of students' progress and the monitoring of teaching.
- The senior leaders and subject leaders are now carrying out more regular lesson observations to sharpen their awareness of the quality of teaching across the school. However, teachers' targets are not presently based on students' progress, and are not sharply focused on identified areas for improvement in teaching.
- The headteacher has made some effective changes to staffing to tackle underperformance, and along with well-chosen training for teachers this has led to improvements in some subjects. Subject leaders are developing their supporting and monitoring roles, but are not yet sufficiently involved in sharing good practice in teaching or coaching colleagues.
- The Investors in People Award reflects the emphasis the school places on developing the skills of both teaching and support staff, as well as supporting trainee teachers. However, the systems to support supply teachers are inconsistent across subjects, and students do not always make enough progress in these lessons.
- The school has recently revised the way subjects are delivered. Students now take a more manageable number of GCSE courses and have more work-related options, particularly in the sixth form. A wide range of outside visits and out-of-school activities increase students' enjoyment and experience of school. The school farm offers high-quality learning experiences for

many students who greatly benefit from the more practical approach to learning. All these experiences contribute well to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

- The Stratton Education Trust is very supportive and works closely with the senior leaders. The school also has productive links with other local schools through the Biggleswade Community Union of Schools and the Central Bedfordshire Teaching School.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The newly formed governing body has a good awareness of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Its members are now fully involved in monitoring progress and holding leaders and staff to account. They have ensured that the school has taken strong and appropriate action to tackle inadequate leadership and teaching. They have an accurate view of teaching and students' progress. Their decisions on staff pay rises have been based appropriately on the impact of teaching on students' achievement or rewarding teachers for taking on extra responsibilities. They have been very active in supporting the transition to academy status and sponsoring the feeder middle school. They make sure that the school's procedures for safeguarding meet current national requirements. Governors oversee the use of the pupil premium funding, but have not fully reviewed the effectiveness of this additional expenditure in terms of its impact on the achievement of eligible pupils.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	137886
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	412842

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	13–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1260
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	380
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Madeline Russell
Headteacher	Rob Watson
Date of previous school inspection	N/A
Telephone number	01767 220000
Fax number	01767 220002
Email address	office@stratton.beds.sch.uk

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